

Nina Philipsen, Columbia University

Associations among Feeding Behaviors and Early Physical and Health Outcomes

Although the importance of infant feeding practices for children's health outcomes have been widely studied and emphasized, the prevalence and effect of different feeding combinations is largely unexplored. The goal of this study was to explore the different combinations of early feeding practices and their influence on child health outcomes in toddlerhood. Using a subsample of 6450 children from the ECLS-B study, data from the parent interview, parent questionnaire, and child assessment were analyzed. Results indicate that 69% of parents initiated breastfeeding, more than 50% introduced formula and/or solid food before 6 months, while less than 50% introduced finger food and/or cow's milk before 6 months. The most frequent feeding combinations were: breast milk with formula and solid/finger food (36%), formula with solid/finger food (23%), breast milk with formula (13%), breast milk with solid/finger food (12%), exclusive breastfeeding (8%), and exclusive formula (8%). After controlling for key demographic and family characteristics, results indicated that early feeding practices influenced child health outcomes (i.e., body mass index, respiratory infection, and ear infections) at two years of age.